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THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION OF THE BACK BAY
NABB NEWS

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■ **PAUL GROGAN**, *continued from page 7*

PSG: I think it is a much more difficult environment now. Our unwillingness to tax ourselves to pay for public services means that in the development process we are often trying to extract significant public benefits from developers. That means that if you want them to pay for things that normally a government would pay for, you are going to let them build higher because that's the way they can increase their fees and profitability, which is going to enable them to pay for all these other things.

I think it is also important to note that as a society we are very skeptical now of big ideas. The Back Bay was a really big idea. Part of that though is that people had a lot of big ideas during the urban renewal period and a lot of them were disastrous. So now development is a product of a lot of clashes of interests without this kind of vision we had. Creating something like the Back Bay now would be very, very tough.

But I think Boston is challenged in that way because we have big development processes unfolding that do require an integrated vision: the Turnpike, Harvard building an enormous second campus in Boston, the Greenway, and the related issue of the waterfront. Any one of those things would be historic and they are all going on more or less at the same time. It does strain our capacity as a community to oversee these things properly.

A related problem that increases the fragmentation is the clash of state and local government interests. State government is deeply intruded into Boston.

For everything we do in Boston there has to be this dance, not just between the city and the state, but the various authorities like the Turnpike Authority, the Transit Authority, and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. It is very difficult and complicated and hard for citizens to understand and participate meaningfully when there are so many different centers of power.

MRY: That leads me to yet another challenge: maintaining and nourishing the citizen activism, that you say has been so essential to Boston's progress. Indeed, in your own essay in the book, you close by saying that activism is at the core of why you are so optimistic about Boston.

But in the trenches those volunteer activists who do so much for the city often feel that they are marginalized in their dealings with public officials and developers. They sometimes have more difficulty getting access to information than they should, more difficulty in getting standing and the respect that they should, often in the face of the clout, the money, and the access of developers. So

NABB efforts pay off and a better DuBarry façade goes up



Finally, the deck and greenhouse structures that have obscured the façade of 157–159 Newbury Street (the former DuBarry Restaurant) since 1979 are coming down. In 2002, NABB began opposing designs that would have extended the existing nonconforming front-yard structures to include an even larger greenhouse and deck. The current, much-improved design is a result of years of

vigilance by the NABB Architecture Committee, assisted by John Devereaux, as well as a change in the building's ownership to Charles and Jolene Sarkis, and close coordination with the Back Bay Architectural Commission. The new plan includes a restaurant on the first and ground floors, with a sunken outdoor eating area in front, and condominiums on the upper floors.

how can we nourish this vital resource in Boston? We can't just take it for granted.

PSG: Well no, you can't. But some recent things encourage me. For instance, there's been a substantial increase in voter participation in the city on local issues, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods. And that is a brand of activism that is very important. I think the other thing that we need to do is to encourage ideas and vision because that will change the debate over time if we are aiming high and trying to hold our leaders to a high standard. Finally, however difficult it is, we have to organize, and that's why associations like the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay can be powerful.

They might feel marginalized, but if they can sustain the activism and get different people involved so that the same people are not carrying the burden all the time, they can make a difference. There are things that have to be stopped. But there are also things that need to go forward. Activists need to have both messages so that they are not just seen as trying to bar the door and maintain the status quo. Because a city does have to grow and develop.

Boston and a lot of cities face a challenge in creating what I call a civic realm in which there will be vision and ideas and activism that will have a context. It used to be in Boston that the government, business leaders, and the church would drive things. If you think about it, the government is still crucial.

We have a strong-mayor form of government and we have had strong occupants of that office. The Catholic Church is waning very significantly as a source of authority in the civic realm. And traditional business leadership is really on the decline. The Vault is gone. So there is a kind of vacuum in Boston in terms of how things can come together.

MRY: If we don't have that kind of energized civic realm and we've lost the kind of concentrated business leadership that The Vault represented, we are essentially faced with having all the power in the hands of the political leadership.

PSG: That's right. That's a corollary of it. Political leadership is vital. We've been blessed by having, on balance, excellent political leadership over the past 25 to 30 years. But it is not enough. Private initiative, community initiative is crucial both to stop things and to make things happen. Governor Sargent wouldn't have stopped the Inner Belt all by himself. There was a tremendous amount of community activism that changed the definition of what this issue was all about.

THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAVE TO BE STOPPED. BUT THERE ARE ALSO THINGS THAT NEED TO GO FORWARD. ACTIVISTS NEED TO HAVE BOTH MESSAGES.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL FRIEDMAN, THE BOSTON COURANT



Clarendon Receives City and State Approvals

SUE PRINDLE AND JACQUELIN YESSIAN

ALTHOUGH SOME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES remain to be addressed, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the Zoning Board of Appeal, and the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs have approved the Clarendon project at the corner of Clarendon and Stuart Streets. Final design details will be worked out with the BRA and the state in the coming months. Construction is expected to begin in the first quarter of 2006 and be completed in 2008.

NABB has been particularly engaged in the public process for this project, since it falls within NABB's boundaries, which include the railroad yards that were built over in the 1920s to form the Stuart Street corridor.

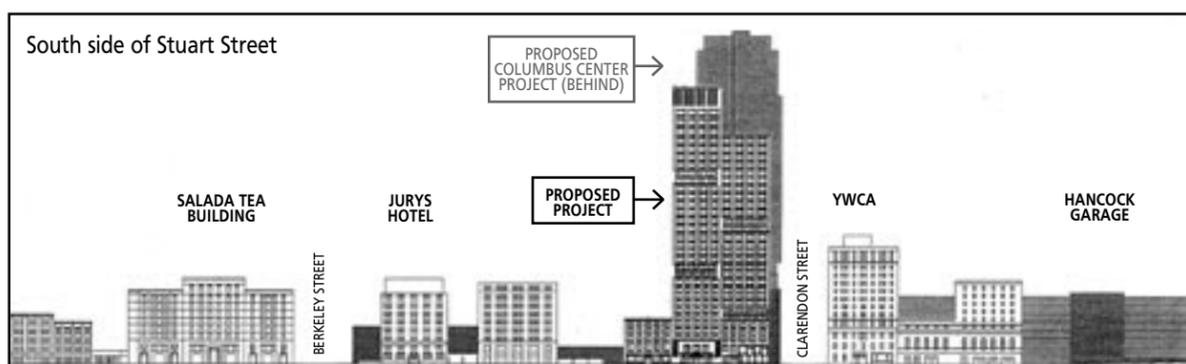
As currently proposed, the project consists of a 32-story residential building, a 3-story underground garage, a restaurant, a private health club, and a new post office. Thirteen percent of the residential units (a mix of condo and rental units) will be designated as much-needed affordable housing. The current Back Bay Post Office will be moved to a new location within the 02116 zip code while the building is being constructed. As part of the project, the 8-story building at 131 Clarendon, which houses the Hard Rock Café and several offices, will not be altered. With the already approved Columbus Center project, the Clarendon will provide a significant infusion of new residential units into an area that has until now been largely office space.

ZONING ISSUES PARAMOUNT FOR NABB

At 363' (including mechanical equipment), the building significantly exceeds the 150' height limit in the area. For this reason, and because the building potentially serves as a precedent for the entire Stuart Street area, NABB opposed the height and setback variances requested by the developer at the

Neighborhood Association, and the Boston Living Center. (Several other entities that were invited to participate declined.) Although the group's mandate under Article 80 is simply to advise the BRA about the project, the IAG did provide an opportunity for putting forth ideas about the project.

The IAG's main concern was the project's



Board of Appeal. The variances were granted, but the good news is that no variance was requested for the FAR (the volume of the building) because it is considerably less than zoning allows (8.56 in an area zoned for 10). This means that many impacts—traffic, water and sewer, and electrical, for example—will be less than might have been anticipated.

NABB participated in the Impact Advisory Group (IAG) for the project, which also included the Back Bay Association, the Bay Village Neighborhood Association, the Ellis South End

violation of existing zoning and the precedent for height that it could establish for the Stuart Street corridor. Since approval of a height variance seemed inevitable, the IAG decided to press for a study to provide a forum for a discussion of development between the Prudential Center and Bay Village, and between Boylston St. and Columbus Avenue. At a public meeting on June 21, the BRA announced that it would undertake such a study. As of this writing, the BRA Board is being asked to approve the hiring of a consultant to undertake the study. In addition, as part of its approval process, the Massachusetts Historic Commission (supported by the Boston Landmarks Commission), is requiring that the developer undertake a study to landmark the area.

Private Markets and Common Needs: Achieving a Better Balance

BARNEY FRANK SHARES HIS THOUGHTS AT NABB'S 50TH ANNUAL MEETING

Barney Frank knows the Back Bay. He lived on both Marlborough Street and Commonwealth Avenue in the 1970s, when he worked as an aide to Mayor Kevin White and when he represented the neighborhood in the state House of Representatives. And he knows NABB. He worked with NABB in those years on a number of issues. He played an instrumental role in tightening zoning restrictions in the residential district,



establishing the Clarendon Street Playground, installing new streetlights on Commonwealth Avenue, and approving the residential parking program. While he no longer represents the neighborhood, he still celebrates it and enjoys showing it to visitors as an example of urban living at its best.

Congressman Frank represents the 4th Congressional district in Massachusetts. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives since 1981, he is now the senior Democrat on the House Financial Services Committee, which deals with domestic and global economic issues.

The following is a summary of remarks Congressman Frank delivered on September 25 at the First Church in Boston.

"How do you get the full benefit of the free market while still preserving some elements of social comity?" That is the question Congressman Frank opened with and that he asserted was the central question of our time. It is a question that he wrestles with regularly now, and as he looks back, one that he first began to confront when representing the Back Bay and surrounding neighborhoods.

Just about all of us in the U.S., he said, are capitalists. We embrace the free-market system and see it as the best way to promote goods and

services and create wealth. From that starting point, he continued, it follows that we accept inequality as a good thing, not as a necessary evil. "If people are not unequally rewarded for their talents, their energy, their willingness to work, their lucky guesses in figuring out what consumers want, then the system doesn't work well."

Yet, if the private sector is left entirely to itself, Frank asserted, it will yield more inequality than is socially healthy or necessary for efficiency. *continued on page 2*

SOME ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS REMAIN

Because of concerns of the project's immediate neighbors, the building's tower, which had initially been set on the Post Office site, was moved closer to Clarendon Street. This move provides a better view corridor for the residents of the adjacent Pope Building. Although the developer has set the entire building back from Clarendon Street to align with the old Hancock Building rather than with the Hard Rock building, the new tower location will require significantly more wind mitigation along Clarendon Street and will increase shadows on Trinity Church in the winter.

Winds in the area, as residents well know, are already strong and often dangerous due to the sheer wall of the Hancock Tower at Clarendon and St. James streets. The Columbus Center project, which is also slated to begin construction in the next year

continued on page 2

Anniversary Special

This issue of NABB News carries a special insert documenting highlights of NABB's 50th-anniversary celebration. Our coverage begins on page 3.

ALSO INSIDE: Boston Foundation president Paul Grogan talks about the city's livability (page 6).

■ CLARENDON, continued from page 1

or so, will further increase wind speeds in the area from the conditions we now experience. While it is probably not reasonable to ask the Clarendon project to be responsible for this situation, we are concerned that in some locations the project will cause even windier conditions. It will be in everyone's interest—not the least the developer's—to seek solutions to this problem.

The Final Environmental Impact Report submitted to the State indicated that the new tower would increase the shadow on Trinity Church. The new shadow will occur between October and March during the early morning services, blocking the light to the windows on the east side of the church. It is hoped that negotiations between the developer and Trinity Church will take into account the public's interest in the church as an historic structure, as well as the church's own concerns. The Trinity Church building, designed by H.H. Richardson, is a National Historic Landmark and deserves special consideration.

A Transportation Access Plan Agreement (TAPA) is being negotiated by the City

Transportation Department. It will address issues of increased traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, in the immediate area. Traffic increases on Clarendon and Berkeley Streets, which are already congested, will need to be accommodated. In addition, there will be a significant increase in the number of pedestrians on Clarendon Street in the peak hour (which will affect vehicular traffic as well). While sidewalks in the area will be widened, it is not clear that this measure will be sufficient. NABB has expressed its concern that the Columbus Center project, which was to include a pedestrian tunnel to the Orange Line, has been changed to eliminate this feature. We are hopeful that the tunnel issue (and the tunnel) can be reopened as part of the Clarendon approvals.

In response to concerns about groundwater, the developer has agreed to implement a geotechnical construction program during construction, and to install six observation wells on site. It is anticipated that every effort will be made to ensure the safety of the surrounding historic buildings, which are built on wooden pilings that have already been exposed to severely lowered groundwater levels. In addition, the developer has agreed to implement a roof recharge

system if it is feasible. In an area of such depleted groundwater and such vulnerable construction, NABB feels that it is imperative that every effort be made to implement a groundwater recharge system.

FURTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED

Although the public phase of the approval process is virtually concluded, several important agencies have yet to sign off on the project. The Massachusetts Historical Commission, which is charged with protecting historic resources in the Commonwealth, has yet to release its report and is seeking landmarking of the immediate area as mitigation for the project. The Massachusetts Development Finance Agency, from which the developers are seeking financing, must also approve. The last step in the approval process will be the BRA Cooperation Agreement, including the TAPA, which the IAG will have an opportunity to review. While we do not anticipate major changes to the project at this point, NABB will be watching to make sure that the mitigation that has been agreed to is implemented, and that the outstanding environmental issues are adequately addressed.

■ BARNEY FRANK, continued from page 1

Adverse environmental consequences, such as too much noise, overcrowding, a lack of sunlight, or more serious effects such as a desecration of the water supply or poor health will result.

Those with more money can escape many of these problems. But not altogether. "You can buy a gas mask, but you can't walk around with it all the time." So no matter how much money you have, Frank added, you have some interest in working with others to restrain the free market. The rich, like everyone else, have a stake in trying to figure out how much restraint to put on the free market "without shutting it down altogether or substantially impeding it."

Frank recalled his and NABB's efforts in trying to achieve such a balance for the Back Bay. Here the challenge was, and remains, to scale down what the private market would do in order to retain the livability of the neighborhood. People in the Back Bay, he was quick to point out, understand how the private market works. "This is not exactly a neighborhood of Amish people who have eschewed the private market." People recognize the role of market forces but want development to occur in ways that protect what is so special about the neighborhood.

At the national level, Frank emphasized, such a sense of balance has been lost. People have all too often lost sight of the fact that there is a positive role government can play. It troubles him, he said, that people in his business brag about how they have cut government without specifying what functions they have cut and why. Maybe, he acknowledged, there were inefficiencies in some cases that warranted reductions. But he added that in his 37 years in government, with the exception of people objecting to parking and speeding tickets, he could not recall complaints he had received about people getting "too much government." "Nobody ever said, 'It snowed and they cleaned the streets in only four hours,' or, 'I called the Social Security office and they answered on the third ring. Don't they have anything better to do?' or, 'The parks are so clean that they are probably wasting money here.'"

Frank stated that it also troubles him when he hears people say that tax cuts are always good because it is not the government's money, but rather the people's money. Frank does not dispute

the "people's money" claim, but cautions that no matter how much money people have, their quality of life depends on some things being done together—through government. "It has become fashionable to deny that."

Hurricane Katrina, he underscored, helped many people become more aware that they need government—that there are some things they cannot handle on their own.

His experiences working in the Back Bay, he noted, taught him that while it is good for the economy to prosper, if the private sector "does too well and is unrestrained by some common rules, the quality of life could deteriorate." He noted that from the private-sector standpoint, a 300-foot building is a lot better than a 150-foot building, but it can generate negative side effects, such as wind, traffic, and shadows.

Frank reiterated his belief that as people we have two sets of needs: those that we can best meet ourselves with our own money and those we cannot meet without pooling our resources. "No tax cut in the history of the world has ever put out a fire." In the past few years, Frank emphasized, "We have gone much too far in undoing our capacity as a nation to do things we need to do together."

Frank elaborated that there are two kinds of actions we need to become better at. The first set involves self-interest; cleaning the environment, for example. The Charles River, he pointed out, is a lot nicer than it used to be—not because of any tax cuts, but because of government regulation.

The second set of actions we need to take are a matter of compassion and concern; our willingness to take care of others who are not as well off. In this context, Frank raised the example of rooming houses in the Back Bay. Years ago, there were many more than was socially healthy. But now there are virtually none. Those that were eliminated have not been replaced and that has exacerbated the problem of homelessness. NABB, he noted, has shown some sensitivity to this situation, but must continue to do so in accord with its efforts to improve the livability of the neighborhood.

At a national level, he continued, we are now in a dangerous situation. We have resumed



economic growth after a slowdown at the turn of the century, but for the first time in recent history, economic growth and increased inequality have become linked. We have had a significant increase in productivity because of information technology, however, "All of the gains are going to the owners of capital.

The percentage of national income going to people who receive wages is eroding. Many working people—those earning \$40,000, \$50,000, even \$60,000 a year are increasingly convinced that whether or not the country grows economically is of little relevance to them."

An essential role of government, Frank stressed, is to mitigate this inequality, albeit not to zero or to a point where it has adverse effects on incentive. "We want to civilize the private sector without crippling it." Instead, he asserted, recent public policy at the national level has consciously set out to exacerbate inequality with the assumption that policies that increase inequality lead to greater growth.

Frank warned that it is not in the self-interest of anybody in our society, including those at the top economically, for such policies to continue. He cited an increased sense of anger that gets expressed in resistance to trade bills and in many other ways. "If we do not do a better job as a society of imposing some public limits on the private sector, we are likely to see some kind of kickback that will make things worse."

In his concluding remarks, Frank emphasized that his central work at the national level is to impose some restraints on private markets in the interest of our common values and to do this without damaging the productive capacity of the private sector. He reiterated that he first began to learn the importance of this work and how to go about doing it when he was representing the Back Bay in the state legislature. He recalled that at any given moment, those in the development business might be exasperated by NABB's opposition to their projects. But it was "also the case that if everything the first handful of developers wanted had been given to them exactly as they wanted it, development would have stopped twenty years ago. They would have gotten a lot of big projects but the negative impacts would have been so great that people would have said, 'No more!'" This is a lesson that helps guide his work as a congressman.

**HURRICANE KATRINA
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MRY: While *The Good City* was not necessarily intended as a celebration of Boston, it presents a highly positive review of the progress the city has made over the past couple of decades. James Howard Kunstler, in a recent book (*The City in Mind: Notes on the Urban Condition*, The Free Press, 2003), reflects the same theme and predicts that Boston will become "America's most habitable city" in the first quarter of the 21st century. What bases are there for such positive assessments?

PSG: It is striking that so much of what authors in *The Good City* say is positive. It reflects their assessment that Boston has become an incredibly vital place, offering much of the best of city life. They also present a lot of testimony that we have made progress on the things that were really bad about Boston, especially the provincialism and the ethnic and racial conflict of the past. Another factor underlying their optimism is that Boston is either a little big-city or a big little-city, depending on your point of view. It has retained this feel of manageability and intimacy. Some people still think of it as a village compared to New York. But it has big-city amenities, big-city excitement. It really offers the best of urban living, but yet in what people continue to see as a very intimate village-like atmosphere.

MRY: For those of us who knew Boston in the 1970s, there is quite a contrast.

PSG: It's incredible. Boston then was emptied out and desolate. I tell the story in the book about Kevin White and the legendary developer Jim Rouse trying to get financing for Faneuil Hall Marketplace. No Boston-based bank or financial service company thought that it was an idea that would work. That's how deep the pessimism was about Boston. People were just voting "no" on the city in droves.

MRY: What do you point to as the keys to the turnaround?

PSG: Political leadership was crucial, both at the state and city level. It all began in 1949 with Mayor Hynes embracing a partnership with the business community as opposed to preserving and promoting the kind of ethnic conflict between the Irish and the Brahmins that had gone on for the previous hundred years. And he was followed by a line of mayors who got the city moving forward. I'm particularly enamored of Kevin White, for whom I worked and who I thought had a tremendous vision and passion for Boston.

I'd also point out that Governor Frank Sargent made a major contribution by finally calling a halt to all the destructive highway building that did so much to wreck so many cities. He canceled the Inner Belt highway in 1970 and spared what are now some of the city's strongest neighborhoods from tremendous dislocation.

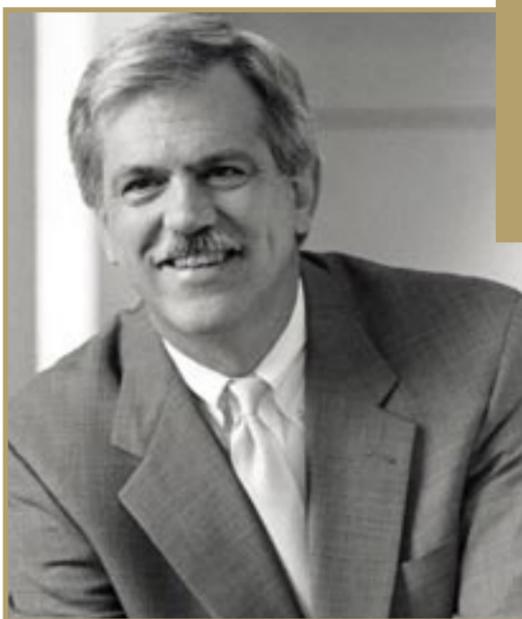
MRY: The success and popularity of Boston creates its own challenges. One of these is to maintain the diversity that is traditionally associated with cities. As Boston gentrifies, are we losing something valuable?

PSG: It is definitely a worry. But I would point out that at present Boston is

incredibly diverse. In fact, we've become a majority-minority city. The relatively open immigration of recent years has helped Boston and a lot of cities with a tremendous influx of people who have a lot of energy.

But I think the danger could be that we become an upper- and lower-income city as the middle becomes hollowed out. And that's where housing prices and continued worries about the quality of public education in Boston really hurt us. Upper-income people either aren't using the schools or can afford private schools. Lower-income people don't have any choice. But middle-income people often leave the city over worries about education. Of course, if they can't afford a home in the first place, that will be a problem.

There are a number of things we have to do about this. First of all, we have to create a lot of housing at all income ranges. This has to happen not



only within Boston but also throughout the region, so that the city alone doesn't shoulder the burden of providing affordable housing for the region. It is a good thing that people of means want to live in the city.

The urban crisis was born of the exit of people and value from the city, leading to widespread abandonment, the decline of cultural institutions, etc.

To decry that people of means come back to the city would seem to me to be suicidal. Instead, we have to create room for everyone. I think it is enormously positive that we have the

opportunity to create housing in Boston where no one has ever lived before, in the downtown and waterfront areas. We can create housing for upper-income people and also for people of modest means in a way that won't displace anyone. And that, over time, will take some of the pressure off the Back Bay where the existing attractive housing has been bid up to such fantastic levels.

We also need to fix the public schools. We have made progress in improving the quality of public

education, but I'm not sure it is enough. I'm thinking of young couples that haven't had children yet or whose children are just reaching school age—what choice are they going to make? We need to capture some fraction of that group of people to stay in Boston for the long term. If they don't have confidence in the schools, they will exit for the suburbs and beyond as previous generations did.

I would say finally we have to make this an opportunity city. We have to

large number of people in a small space. It is vexing that we don't have the constituency for density or for other aspects of urbanity.

One of our major concerns at the Foundation is that talented young people are leaving the region in greater numbers than they used to. Housing costs are part of that. But when you

A CONVERSATION WITH PAUL GROGAN

Paul S. Grogan knows a lot about cities and what makes them viable. He served substantial stints on the front lines with former Boston mayors Kevin White and Raymond Flynn. He headed a community development organization that raised and invested more than \$3 billion of private capital in inner-city revitalization efforts across the U.S. He served as Vice President for Government, Community, and Public Affairs for Harvard University. And since July 2001 he has been President and CEO of the Boston Foundation. One of the nation's oldest and largest community foundations, the Boston Foundation distributed grants of almost \$50 million last year to nonprofit organizations throughout greater Boston. The Foundation's initiatives give major attention to housing, job training, and education.

In this interview with Grogan, NABB News co-editor Mark R. Yessian focuses on the challenges facing the City of Boston and its neighborhoods, paying particular attention to those challenges affecting the Back Bay. The interview starts with a discussion of a book, *The Good City* (Beacon Press, 2004) that examines Boston and that the Foundation took the lead in preparing. The book includes an introduction by Grogan and essays by 15 individuals who know the city well.

have a city that is going to allow for economic mobility, where immigrants and the poor are here but are able to catch a rung on the ladder of opportunity by getting a good education or getting a job that has prospects. Here again, we can do a lot of work because Boston has a skill shortage. There actually is a shortage of labor.

MRY: Another challenge—one that we in the Back Bay are well aware of—is

that of accommodating further development in ways that are compatible with Boston's small scale, its compactness, its livability, its walkability. In an essay in *The Good City*, Robert Campbell notes that Paris, which covers roughly the same area as Boston, has four times Boston's population, but does it with almost no high-rises and with ample parks and boulevards. Why is that so difficult for us to accomplish here?

PSG: One of the paradoxes of Boston and other American cities is that they are not attracted to European densities. There's a real push back to that. I'm

as wary as anyone about development that gives us density in a way that really is jarring and not supportive of that special urban feel that Boston has. On the other hand, we do need more density. The paradox is that the things people love about cities are essentially creatures of density. They occur because of the vibrancy that happens with a

actually ask these young people (as we did in a recent survey) what they don't like about Boston, in addition to housing prices, they talk about the fact that the city shuts down so early. Kids today stay up late. They want to be able to get dinner in the middle of the night. The fact is that New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles are much more alluring to many of them than Boston. But it is residents of the Back Bay who are among the first to express concern when the Mayor or anyone else says maybe we should stay open a little longer.

MRY: Is another underlying tension here that some of those returning to the city want to bring their suburban lifestyles with them—larger spaces, multiple cars, a lifestyle that Boston can be hard-pressed to accommodate?

PSG: That's right. It is an interesting fact that we have more habitable housing units in Boston today, with a city of 600,000 people, than we had when the city had 800,000 people. And it's a function of much smaller households taking up much larger spaces. It creates this crowding-in price appreciation for a smaller group of people.

On the other hand, I think that all those people wanting to come into Boston is very good for the city in lots of ways. They patronize the restaurants and support the cultural institutions. And they pay taxes for a lot of services that they will not use. So it's a real bargain if you can figure out how to accommodate that aging population that is newly attracted to city life.

MRY: Let me go back to the development pressures for a moment. They raise questions about our capacity as a city (and state) to plan for development. The planning for the Back Bay in the 1800s was one of the more successful urban planning efforts in American history. Have we lost that capacity? Has planning become subservient to development?

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